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Turner denies technology dictates CIA staff reductions

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By Leon Pitt

Adm. Stansfield Turner, Central Intelligence Agency director, denied here Monday published reports that some 900 CIA agents are being fired because the agency is using more efficient technical intelligence-gathering processes.

"We did not make the cuts because I think technological intelligence will replace human intelligence. I'm merely cutting the overhead," Turner declared.

He said the staff reductions, announced last August, were due to a buildup of personnel during the Vietnam War. "Excess people are not good for efficiency and morale . . ." Turner stressed at a press conference before addressing a luncheon of the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations.

Newspaper reports over the weekend stated that although CIA officials had said cutbacks in personnel over the next two years are being made for reasons of economy, it is also believed that technology is a factor. In recent years, the CIA has relied increasingly on technical devices, including satellites and electronic interceptors for collection of information.

The reports said the cutbacks, which are expected to be completed by Dec. 31, 1979, will cut deeply into the top ranks of the clandestine organization.

Turner also said Monday America's commercial microwave telecommunications are being intercepted at the Russian Embassy in Washington. The Soviets are monitoring

"whatever goes onto unsecured telephone links" from transmitting microwave satellites, he said.

He said the monitoring would be discussed with the Soviets before long and that, in the meantime, confidential information should be transmitted by cable or "encrypted (coded)."

"This problem (microwave interception) is much more widespread," Turner said, adding that industrial spies and even private citizens are intercepting microwave transmissions.

Turner said his visit to Chicago was "part of the new openness" of the CIA as mandated by President Carter. He said that since he assumed leadership of the much-criticized agency last March, it has become "more open and forthright" with the American public.

However, Turner, a native of Highland Park, stressed that "we must have secrecy. You can't have intelligence without secrecy."

He added that the bulk of intelligence gathering was not from "clandestine" operations but through research "just like you would find in a large corporation or university."

Noting that the CIA reports to at least eight congressional committees at various times, Turner said the practice gives "balance" to the CIA but it also entails risks. One risk, he said, is "timidity," another is "leaks."